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I believe in civic engagement and volunteerism for many reasons. For starters, the older generation would say that it builds character. This is very much the truth, however, there is much more to it than that. Character is definitely an important aspect. But, more importantly, we must understand the impact volunteering has on others. For example, I am a member of an organization called Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America. I hold the position of Vice-President for my district. My job is to organize the district STAR (Students Taking Action with Recognition) competition. This requires a large amount of civic engagement because I have to find judges for the competition and make sure the day runs smoothly. I was a part of this process and coordinated this event for the positive impact it could make on others. In retrospect, I find that I did not participate with the conscious intent to build character; the character building was an added bonus.

This is the reason why I believe in civic engagement and volunteerism. From a personal standpoint, I enjoy seeing the impact I have made on other people. When unmet needs exist, I feel that civic engagement exists to reward communities for the selfless act of volunteering to accomplish these goals. Everyone needs people to support them in their endeavors. Every time I can help meet a need, I take pride in knowing I helped improve someone's life while doing the right thing.

The right thing can be a huge motivator in volunteering. The questions we should ask are "what is the right thing?", and "why should we take part?" I view the right thing as seeing something that needs done and helping to get it done. Usually, people appreciate it if someone

else gives up their time to help us in our endeavors. A reason volunteerism is so important to me is because without it I have no idea where the world would be.

Another organization in which I am involved is the State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council. I hold the position of Service Chair. This organization was established with a political agenda, and I have always been very interested in politics. By combining something I enjoy with a volunteer role, I see my position as proof that civic engagement can be enjoyable. Some people feel that volunteering is boring. This does not have to be the case. Volunteering can be fun, and the more you put into it, the more fun you can get out of it. For example part of my position as Service Chair dictates that I put together an MLK day project. The Council is volunteering at the Lifeline Youth Foundation. The more accessible activities I can provide volunteers opportunities with to participate in, the more successful our event will be. This also goes a long way to show that it is the little things in life that make a difference. It is just one day of helping out, and yet often all it takes is one day or one random act of kindness to have a positive impact.

A positive impact on another human being is incredibly important. When I volunteer to help someone out I find that person tends to have a much more positive outlook on life. They can then make a positive impact on someone else. Before we know it someone is volunteering to help another person out and the cycle can begin again.

As a member of the National Honor Society I have picked up litter along the highway and held a blood-drive. One blood-drive and picking up the highway may not seem like a lot, however if you look at the number of lives that blood donation can save or the aesthetic pleasure a clean highway can make, the difference becomes apparent.

Last year I was a member of the Youth Leadership Initiative (YLI) of Greater Des Moines. Through this I realized that civic engagement and volunteerism not only can be fun, but offers an opportunity to meet new people. Some people, when you allow them to, will change your life. As an YLI group, we completed service-learning projects by working together to accomplish our goals.

A group that I became involved in at the beginning of this school year is called as Young Leaders of Character. We go around to different schools and talk to students about character. Through volunteerism and civic-engagement I have learned important speaking techniques and abilities. It has taught me how to keep large groups of people interested and participating the entire time.

Many people find themselves nervous in regards to volunteerism. Over this last summer I attended a conference known as the Hugh O'Brian Youth Summit. It taught me that when it comes to volunteering its ok to step out on a ledge. Even if you go out a little too far, lose your footing, and fall off there will be another ledge below that you will land on. You just stand up, check your equipment, and keep going. You can learn from helping others and will not be hurt by it. The more involved that I have become the more comfortable I have felt in different situations.

I believe in civic engagement and volunteerism for many reasons. I feel it really boils down to becoming comfortable with what we face in life. Civic engagement and volunteerism has granted me this ability. Without it, I would not be able to accomplish as much as I have or hope to in my life.